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(2) THE GODS

The festivals of these deities are in fact in every way similar to that of Kuan Yin. At the festival of Tung Yueh, the Taoist King of the Underworld, there are some slight variations. In front of the main shrine of this temple there is a large water tank crossed by a low bridge of stone. Here curious rites are performed intended to assist the dead to escape from hell. Little cheap pottery bowls with a lighted candle stuck in them are launched on the waters of the tank, and the worshipper endeavours to steer the bowl under the bridge into the other part of the tank, and so to the further side of it. If this is successfully performed it is believed to be an omen that the soul of the deceased person has escaped from hell. At the same time little ladders made of bamboo, the size of toys, are lowered end on into the water, also with the intention of helping the dead to escape from the underworld. It is not easy to steer the bowls with their candles still alight to safety, for the worshipper must not touch the bowls, only being allowed to swish the water about with a stick and so create currents which waft the bowl through the narrow opening of the bridge. Consequently the surface of the water is soon strewn with candle ends and the bottom of the tank with sunken bowls.

It might be supposed that these evil omens would have a depressing affect on the crowd and the unsuccessful worshippers, but in fact the whole performance seems to be more in the nature of a game than a religious rite. The theoretically solemn business of liberating a soul from torment is left to the unskilful hands of small children, or the too vigorous splashings of schoolboys, while an irreverent crowd of their playmates cheers a success or laughs derisively at a failure. Young men can be heard laying odds on one bowl or against another, a striking instance of the gambling spirit intruding into what was once, perhaps, a truly religious rite.

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the annual or bi-annual festival of some patron deity. In such cases the play is given on a raised stage at the end of the courtyard, and the guests usually feast first, or during the plays, several being given in succession from about two in the afternoon until nearly midnight. Guests who are not members of the Guild can be invited, and these occasions are often used for gambling, Poker and Ma Chang being the favourite games. Poker has been introduced from Europe, as its Chinese name "*Pa sze*" from the English word "Pass" reveals.

The Min Chia are also fond of gambling, card games being the favorite with adults, and dice with children. Boys throw dice for minute sums of money, the "cash" which is still in use in the countryside, usually gathering in some convenient large gateway with smooth stone steps for this sport. The parents do not seem to consider that this game is unsuitable for children. Adults usually invite guests for cards or Ma Chang early in the afternoon; the play then continues until evening, when the feast is served which ends the entertainment. Stakes are rather high, from one dollar silver to five dollars silver a point, and it is admitted that sometimes men are ruined through gambling losses. Card games or Ma Chang are never played "for love". To the Min Chia the latter game is especially a gambler's game, and indeed in China generally this game has the reputation associated with Baccarat or Chemin de Fer in Europe. Gambling as a form of entertainment is popular not so much for itself, as because there is nothing else to take its place. For the wealthy man who has leisure life in a small town such as Ta Li is dull. The comforts of home life are not sufficient to encourage reading as a pleasure, and there is little to do if he goes out in search of distraction. Card games are always popular in such communities, in all parts of the world, but it is unfortunate, in view of the narrow

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margins of their economy, that the Min Chia take no 525
pleasure in them unless they are played for high stakes.

Outdoor sports and games are almost unknown. As has 526
been seen basket ball is slowly becoming a popular school game, but it is never played by grown men, except soldiers. Tennis is still virtually unheard of. The Garrison Commander and his staff officers, men who had spent a large part of their lives in other parts of China, or at K'un Ming, had a court in the grounds of the Garrison Headquarters, but after they departed for the war front it was no longer used. Nor do the Min Chia hunt or shoot. Very occasionally young men will go out with a gun on the mountain side, but it is in no sense an organised sport. On the other hand, fishing parties are frequently given by those who live near the lake. Small boats are hired, and the guests are invited for the day, most of which is spent fishing with the line from the boats in the lagoons, or in the shallows of the lake, until in the late afternoon a feast is served. The fish caught are usually small both in size and number, but the guests seem to be more attracted by the boating than by the fishing for which it is an excuse.

Boating on the lake, except at the festival of the Dragon 527
King, is not practised as a pleasure, partly no doubt because the lakeside people have to do it for their livelihood, and those from the city or inland villages can rarely spare the time to walk a considerable distance to the lake, find and hire a boat, and then amuse themselves by aimless cruising. This would seem a fantastic waste of money to the Min Chia. But if some reason can be given for the expedition, they are delighted to find an excuse for sailing on the lake. One such excuse, or reason, is provided by the pear harvest in the orchards on the eastern shore. It has become a custom, annually renewed by some of the lakeside families who are fairly well-to-do, to invite friends for a day's

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517 men sit and smoke and gossip, and the women spin yarn of hemp thread, make shoes or embroidery, or sew clothing.

527 During the first moon families invite friends and relatives
[525] to a feast where they eat, smoke, talk, and drink wine. There is very little gambling. At this time people may amuse themselves by "playing lion," when two men covered by an imitation lion's skin dance about and fight with a man who always conquers the lion.

517 While working in the fields, tending their flocks, gathering wood or working in their homes, men and women talk and sing songs. When bringing home loads of wood or corn or some other produce they
[562] may stop at a convenient resting-place and chat. There is considerable freedom between the sexes--that is, they visit and talk freely together, with comparatively little sexual irregularity.

535 At Chiu Tzu T'un in 1933 the writer witnessed a dance by
171 twelve women and six men. The women were lined up on the right and the men on the left. First the men would sing a line of a song, dancing rhythmically, and waving their arms from side to side. Occasionally there was a slight, quick lowering of the body. There were graceful steps in unison, a swaying of the body, and a stamping of the feet While singing each line each person turned around com-
[415] pletely one time. It was both interesting and graceful. There was a jar of wine from which the performers drank through small bamboo tubes. As the wine became low, fresh water was poured into the jar. The dance was led by a female relative of the local ruler. Since she was a Jia Rung, and the Jia Rung are very near, since the dance is lacking in other parts of the Ch'iang region, and since it very closely resembles the Jia Rung dance, it seems safe to assume that this dance was borrowed from the Jia Rung.

2. Engagements.

584 Sometimes through singing "Mountain songs or otherwise a young man and a young women become attached to each other and desire to get married In that case they must request their parents to appoint middle men to make the necessery arrangements, and the consent of the two families must be obtained

In Ch'iang engagements middle men are always necessary. Marriage is not an individual, but a family affair. Generally the young people are not given a choice, but the choice is made for them. A